2025 ECONOMIC REPORT

SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The South Central Region is comprised of 12 counties in the center of the southern portion of Missouri. The region is home to several cities including West Plains and Poplar Bluff.

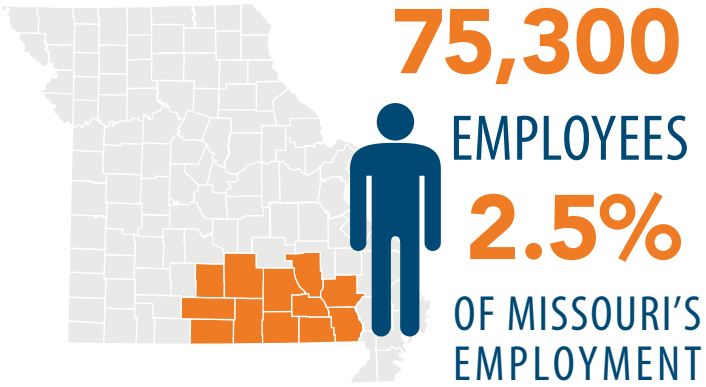
The South Central Region workforce had more than 75,300 employees in 2024, making up 2.5 percent of Missouri's employment. In 2024, 53.1 percent of the workforce was female and 46.9 percent was male, while the Missouri average was 50.1 percent female and 49.9 percent male workers in the workforce. The regional average unemployment rate in 2024 was 4.6 percent, compared to 3.7 percent for Missouri and 4.0 percent for the nation.

The workforce is getting older in the South Central Region, a trend continuing throughout Missouri and the U.S. In 2024, 24.5 percent of the workforce was age 55 or older, up from 20 percent a decade earlier. It was 23.5 percent for Missouri and 24.1 percent for the nation.

For the region, 7.0 percent of the workforce was non-white and 2.8 percent was Hispanic or Latino. This compares to the state averages of 18.1 percent non-white and 5.1 percent Hispanic or Latino.

In the South Central Region, 2.5 percent of the region's population (ages 18 to 64) speaks a language other than English at home. By comparison, Missouri was at 7.4 percent and the U.S. was at 23.8 percent.

The South Central Region has a higher percentage of the population with a disability compared to the state and the nation. For the South Central Region, 21.7 percent of the population has a disability compared to 12.6 percent in Missouri and 10.7 percent in the U.S.



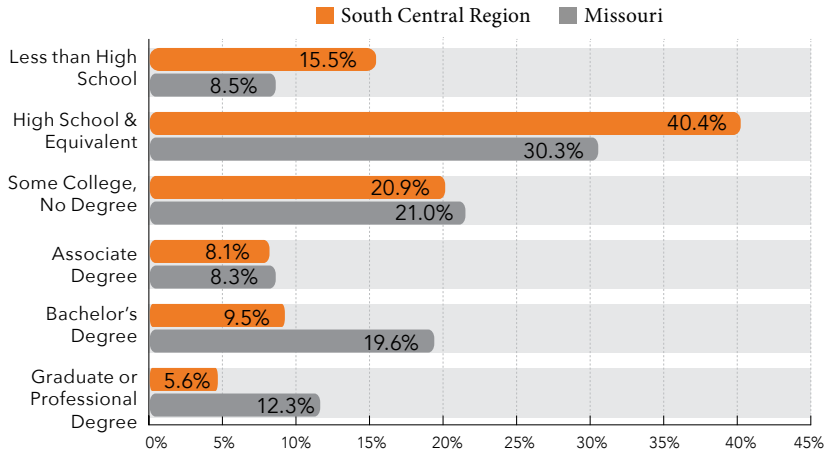
Workforce Demographics

	South Central Region	Missouri	United States
Average Monthly Employment in 2024	75,386	3,016,886	161,346,000
Average Unemployment Rate in 2024	4.6%	3.7%	4.0%
Male	46.9%	49.9%	51.2%
Female	53.1%	50.1%	48.8%
Non-White	7.0%	18.1%	24.9%
Hispanic or Latino	2.8%	5.1%	18.3%
Ages 55 and Older	24.5%	23.5%	24.1%
With Disabilities (Ages 18-64)	21.7%	12.6%	10.7%
Below Poverty Levels (Ages 18-64)	19.3%	12.1%	11.6%
Language other than English (Ages 18-64)	2.5%	7.4%	23.8%
Education of Associate Degree or Higher (25 years & Older)	23.2%	40.2%	43.8%
Veterans (Age 18-64)	6.7%	4.7%	4.2%

SOURCE: QWI 2024 Q1; PRIVATE OWNERSHIP. CENSUS 2023 ACS 5 YEARS DATA, LAUS 2024 DATA

Educational attainment rates for the South Central Region are lower than those of the state for those with bachelor's or advanced degrees. Twenty-three percent of the region's population age 25 and older, has an associate, bachelor's, or advanced degree compared to 40.2 percent for the state, and 43.8 percent for the nation. About 15.5 percent of the region's population age 25 and older has less than high school education.

Educational Attainment



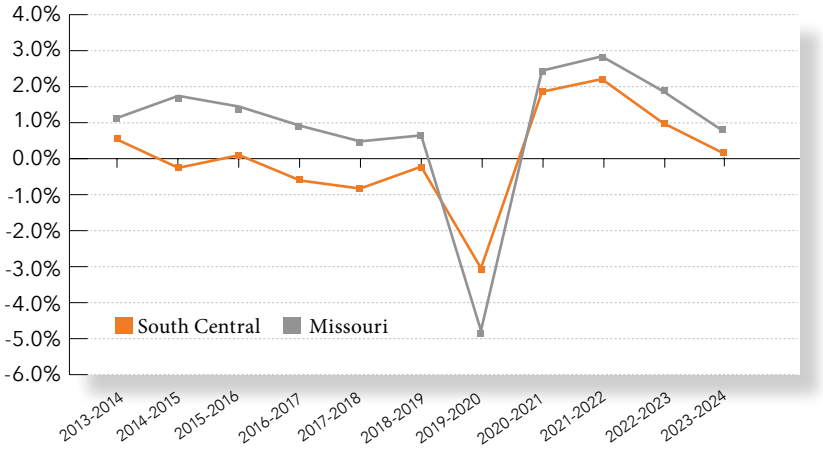
SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, ACS 2023 5 YEAR ESTIMATES

SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

INDUSTRY ANALYSIS

The South Central Region averaged over 60,500 jobs in 2024. Employment in the region increased by 0.2 percent from 2023. Missouri employment increased by 0.8 percent in 2024. From 2020 to 2024, the South Central Region averaged a 1.1 percent annual growth rate for an overall gain 5.8 percent. During that same period (2020-2024) Missouri's compound annual employment gain was 1.6 percent for an overall gain of 8.3 percent.

South Central Employment Annual Growth Rate



SOURCE: BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, QCEW

Health Care and Social Assistance is the largest employing industries in the region with over 12,800 jobs in 2024. Since 2020, the industry has increased by 660 jobs and a 1.1 percent compound annual growth rate. *Manufacturing* is the second largest industry in the area with over 8,100 jobs. It gained 341 jobs since 2020. The *Accommodation and Food Services, Retail Trade,* and *Educational Services* industries also gained 968, 797 and 543 jobs, respectively, since 2020.

Wholesale Trade (-124) and *Management of Companies and Enterprises* (-65) were among the industry sectors that decreased in employment compared to 2020.

South Central Region Top Employing Industries

	Employment 2020	Employment 2024	Net Change	2020-2024 CAGR	2023 Annual Wages
Health Care and Social Assistance	12,174	12,834	660	1.1%	$42,432
Manufacturing	7,821	8,162	341	0.9%	$47,628
Retail Trade	6,957	7,754	797	2.2%	$33,828
Educational Services	5,922	6,465	543	1.8%	$39,024
Accommodation and Food Services	4,285	5,253	968	4.2%	$21,708
Public Administration	3,085	3,089	4	0.0%	$45,120
Construction	1,686	2,012	326	3.6%	$50,424
Finance and Insurance	1,694	1,687	-7	-0.1%	$54,384
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	1,488	1,662	174	2.2%	$71,748
Wholesale Trade	1,735	1,611	-124	-1.5%	$56,388
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	1,263	1,440	177	2.7%	$38,484
Transportation and Warehousing	1,257	1,339	82	1.3%	$49,800
Other Services (except Public Administration)	1,183	1,254	71	1.2%	$35,700
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	494	599	105	3.9%	$40,476
Information	565	560	-5	-0.2%	$56,916
Utilities	476	530	54	2.2%	$84,804
Management of Companies and Enterprises	573	508	-65	-2.4%	$60,108
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	460	485	25	1.1%	$76,332
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	349	359	10	0.6%	$41,496
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	281	324	43	2.9%	$24,264

SOURCE: LEHD QWI, 2020-2024 QUARTER 2 DATA, LEHD QWI 2023 ANNUAL AVERAGE FOR WAGES. ALL OWNERSHIP

LOCATION QUOTIENT

To understand the major industries within a region, an analysis of industry concentration or clustering can be useful. The Location Quotient (LQ) describes the concentration of an industry in a geographic region, in relation to the nation, with 1.0 being the national average. Industries with higher than 1.0 LQ indicate a concentration.

The South Central Region has higher concentrations in *Wood Product Manufacturing, Gasoline Stations and Fuel Dealers, Machinery Manufacturing,* and *Social Assistance.*

HIGHEST 2024

LQ 8.8

WOOD PRODUCT MANUFACTURING

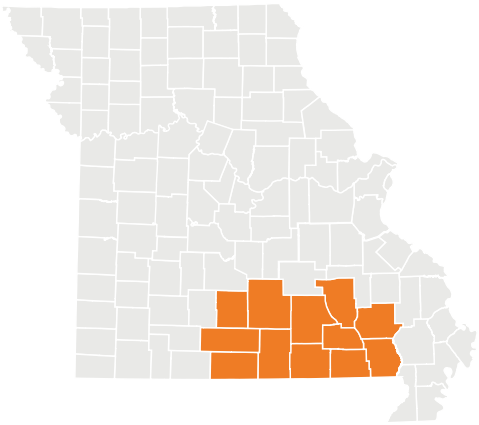
2024 South Central Region Location Quotients

Industry	Employment	Location Quotient
Wood Product Manufacturing	1,417	8.8
Gasoline Stations and Fuel Dealers	1,472	3.6
Machinery Manufacturing	946	2.2
Social Assistance	3,951	2.2
Forestry and Logging	39	2.1
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	2,361	1.8
Animal Production and Aquaculture	189	1.8
General Merchandise Retailers	2,255	1.8
Building Material and Garden Equipment and Supplies Dealers	909	1.7
Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers	1,152	1.4
Goods-Producing	10,858	1.2
Credit Intermediation and Related Activities	1,215	1.2
Truck Transportation	714	1.2
Repair and Maintenance	645	1.1

SOURCE: U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, QUARTERLY CENSUS OF EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES 2024

SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

Projected growth in industry helps to identify future employment needs for an area. Projections indicate that the largest industry growth in the South Central Region from 2022-2032 will be in the *Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services; Social Assistance; General Merchandise Retailers; Machinery Manufacturing;* and *Total Federal Government Employment.*



South Central Largest Growth Industries 2022-2032

	Employment 2022	Employment 2032	Change 2022-2032 Numeric	Change 2022-2032 Percent
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	1,365	1,928	**563**	41.2%
Social Assistance	4,052	4,526	**474**	11.7%
General Merchandise Retailers	2,511	2,862	**351**	14.0%
Machinery Manufacturing	1,895	2,195	**300**	15.8%
Total Federal Government Employment	1,443	1,601	**158**	10.9%
Religious, Grantmaking, Civic, Professional, and Similar Organizations	917	1,036	**119**	13.0%
Transit and Ground Passenger Transportation	209	295	**86**	41.1%
Merchant Wholesalers, Durable Goods	970	1,022	**52**	5.4%
Merchant Wholesalers, Nondurable Goods	684	735	**51**	7.5%
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Musical Instrument, Book, and Miscellaneous Retailers	450	499	**49**	10.9%

SOURCE: MERIC INDUSTRY PROJECTIONS, 2022-2032

PROJECTED GROWTH BY INDUSTRY HELPS TO IDENTIFY FUTURE EMPLOYMENT NEEDS FOR AN AREA.

OCCUPATIONAL PROJECTIONS

MERIC produces occupational projections that estimates labor demand over a 10-year period. The current projections cycle projected industry and occupation employment from 2022-2032. MERIC categorizes these occupations using its Now-Next-Later method to help job seekers understand the training, education, and experience requirements for various occupations.

NOW jobs typically require short-term on-the-job training, little to no experience, and/or a high school diploma. Now occupations with the most projected openings are *Home Health and Personal Care Aides; Cashiers;* and *Stockers and Order Fillers*. Home *Health and Personal Care Aides; Stockers and Order Fillers;* and *Bartenders* are projected to be the fastest growing **Now** occupations over the next decade.

NEXT jobs typically require a non-degree certificate, associate degree, apprenticeship, some experience, or moderate- to long-term training. *Cooks, Restaurant; Miscellaneous Assemblers and Fabricators;* and *Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers* are projected to have the most openings for the **Next** category of occupations. *Industrial Machinery Mechanics; Cooks, Restaurant;* and *Maintenance and Repair Workers, General* are the fastest growing **Next** occupations.

LATER jobs typically require a bachelor's degree or higher. For **Later** occupations, *General and Operations Managers; Registered Nurses;* and *Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education* are projected to have the most openings. *Registered Nurses* and *General and Operations Managers* are the fastest growing **Later** occupations.

South Central Region Fastest Growing Occupations

NOW

- *Home Health and Personal Care Aides* ★
- *Stockers and Order Fillers* ★
- *Bartenders*
- *Retail Salespersons* ★
- *Fast Food and Counter Workers*

NEXT

- *Industrial Machinery Mechanics*
- *Cooks, Restaurant*
- *Maintenance and Repair Workers, General*

LATER

- *Registered Nurses* ★
- *General and Operations Managers* ★

SOURCE: MERIC OCCUPATIONAL PROJECTIONS, 2022-2032

NOTE: OCCUPATIONS WITH ANNUAL TOTAL OPENINGS OF LESS THAN 50 ARE OMITTED

★ *DENOTES OCCUPATIONS IN THE TOP TEN ONLINE JOB ADS FOR MAY 2023- APRIL 2024 IN THE REGION AND WITHIN THE NOW-NEXT-LATER CLASSIFICATION*

SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

SOUTH CENTRAL REGION LONG-TERM OCCUPATIONAL PROJECTIONS BY TOP OPENINGS

OCCUPATION TITLE	2022 Estimated Employment	2032 Projected Employment	Annual Growth Openings	Annual Exits	Annual Transfers	Annual Total Openings	Median Wages
NOW OCCUPATIONS							
Home Health and Personal Care Aides ★	3,816	4,452	64	331	276	**671**	$28,836
Cashiers ★	2,412	2,058	-35	215	217	**397**	$27,079
Stockers and Order Fillers ★	1,290	1,450	16	85	134	**235**	$30,264
Retail Salespersons ★	1,239	1,318	8	84	101	**193**	$29,783
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand ★	1,343	1,327	-2	64	108	**170**	$30,629
NEXT OCCUPATIONS							
Cooks, Restaurant	709	873	16	54	64	**134**	$29,632
Miscellaneous Assemblers and Fabricators	1,307	1,223	-8	54	80	**126**	$33,963
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers ★	1,124	1,078	-5	50	64	**109**	$46,239
Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	865	896	3	39	40	**82**	$40,362
Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary	724	670	-5	40	41	**76**	$29,178
LATER OCCUPATIONS							
General and Operations Managers ★	1,839	1,950	11	47	102	**160**	$59,986
Registered Nurses ★	1,443	1,616	17	51	32	**100**	$74,421
Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	1,266	1,169	-10	41	40	**71**	$45,809
Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	931	855	-8	26	29	**47**	$48,077
Substitute Teachers, Short-Term	413	392	-2	25	23	**46**	$30,897

SOURCE: MERIC OCCUPATIONAL PROJECTIONS, 2022-2032 ★ *DENOTES OCCUPATIONS IN THE TOP TEN ONLINE JOB ADS FOR MAY 2023- APRIL 2024 IN THE REGION AND WITHIN THE NOW-NEXT-LATER CLASSIFICATION*

ONLINE JOB POSTINGS

Job postings are an indicator of demand and opportunities in an area and can assist individuals seeking job opportunities in current in-demand occupations. According to information based on online job posting data collected and aggregated from May 1, 2024 to April 30, 2025 by Lightcast™ for the South Central Region, jobs like *Registered Nurses, First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers*, and *Home Health and Personal Care Aides* had a high number of job postings in the region.

OCCUPATION TITLE	ONLINE JOB POSTINGS
NOW OCCUPATIONS	
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	240
Retail Salespersons	190
Merchandise Displayers and Window Trimmers	180
Cashiers	80
Customer Service Representatives	70
NEXT OCCUPATIONS	
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	240
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	230
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	220
Pharmacy Technicians	100
Health Technologists and Technicians, All Other	100
LATER OCCUPATIONS	
Registered Nurses	660
Physical Therapists	170
Orthodontists	140
Obstetricians and Gynecologists	90
Medical and Health Services Managers	90

SOURCE: LIGHTCAST™, ONLINE JOB ADS FROM MAY 1, 2024 - APRIL 30, 2025